Post-Traumatic

The PLAN Tool—Prepare to Face Triggers

The PLAN Tool

There are situations that you know about that will affect you emotionally or physically because they remind you of your traumatic experience. PLAN can be a helpful strategy in these circumstances.

- Step 1: **P**repare for the situation.
- Step 2: Let go of your worry.
- Step 3: Accept that you will experience distress and it is possible to manage your reactions.
- Step 4: Note all of your coping skills and help resources.

Step 1: Prepare for the situation.

Your sense of control may have been weakened by experiencing a trauma. A great way to begin regaining your sense of control is by preparing for the trigger or stressful situation. Think about the upcoming situation and how to handle it. Talk about it with someone whose judgment you respect.

- How can you relax yourself before the situation?
- Would it help to take a friend along who knows what you might experience?
- Can you discuss it with a family member and decide on a plan if things don't go well?
- Can you change the situation in some way that will make it easier to deal with?
- What is it about the situation that causes you distress?
- Is this a situation you would be better off avoiding (e.g., you know the situation will provoke extreme anger)?

Step 2: Let go of your worry.

In some ways, it's helpful to know ahead of time when you are going to confront a trigger. Unfortunately, it can also lead to a lot of worry about how you will manage the trigger and the painful reactions you might have. Getting stuck in a struggle with the "what ifs" or drowning in dread is often much worse than going through the actual thing you are worried about. Here are some things you can do to help you let go of your worry:

- Focus on the specific things you have to do and what you've prepared already.
- Think about what exactly you are scared of. Ask yourself if the upcoming situation warrants your fears.
- Mentally rehearse that you are successfully managing the situation.
- Focus on the positives that the situation offers instead of the negatives.
- If you catch yourself worrying, focus on different thoughts, or direct your attention to an activity.

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Step 3: Accept that you will experience distress, AND it is possible to manage your reactions.

Life is stressful sometimes no matter what. After a trauma, the stresses of life can seem even more difficult to manage. Accepting that you will experience upsetting emotions and stress if you are triggered can actually make the stress feel less overwhelming.

- Accepting distress means having realistic expectations about your reactions. It does not mean that you like the situation or feel good about being upset.
- Accepting distress means, that even though you may have upsetting emotions, you will not allow those emotions to control or limit your life.
- Accepting distress means that your feelings don't have to dictate vour behavior.
- You can choose how you respond, even when you feel bad.

Step 4: Note all of your available coping skills and helpful resources.

Think about all of the skills you have for managing stressful situations (including the ones you are learning here). Say to yourself: "During the stressful situation, I can..."

- Have a friend or a loved one with me.
- Refocus my attention on enjoying myself.
- Use relaxation exercises.
- Tell myself things that relax and settle me (e.g., "I'm safe." "That was then, this is now.").
- Use strategies that have worked in the past when I've been triggered.



Step 1: **P**repare for the situation.

Step 2: Let go of your worry.

Step 3: Accept that you will experience distress and it is possible to manage your reaction

Step 4: **N**ote all of your coping skills and help resources.